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Master's Thesis

**Everyday Practices of Belonging:
Japanese Migrant Wives in Korean Society**

일상적 실천을 통한 ‘귀속감’의 형성:

한국 사회의 일본 결혼이주 여성들

February 2015

서울대학교 국제대학원

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Everyday Practices of Belonging:
Japanese Migrant Wives in Korean Society

A thesis presented

by

Araya Chizuru

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Abstract

Everyday Practices of Belonging: Japanese Migrant Wives in Korean Society

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Multiculturalism is a ubiquitous word in Korean society today. Because of increasing foreign workers and marriage-based migrant wives, Korean society seems to be transforming from mono"-cultural to multi-cultural. A number of scholarly articles and newspaper reports, however, have described the actual situation negatively. For example, many of the migrant wives, especially from Southeast countries who arrive through marriage brokers are forced to be assimilated to Korean society. In this paper I first present how the migrant wives and the idea of assimilation have been discussed in Korea. Then, I look at the migrant wives from Japan because of their position situated between wives from Western countries and wives from Southeast Asia. I focus on three situations of their everyday practices: job searching, roles as a daughter-in-law (며느리), and raising a child or children in Korea. Through these everyday practices, I analyze how these Japanese wives respond to the pressure to be assimilated and how they act in the new society.

Assimilation, when mentioned in reference to the foreign wives situations in Korea, often does not mean “being assimilated to Korean society.” For the husbands and parents-in-law of migrant wives, assimilation often means “behaving like an obedient wife” or at least the way that they imagine an "ordinary" Korean woman to behave after marriage. On the other hand, Japanese wives do not have the same expectation of assimilation. Because Japanese society has or used to have similar expectations for married women, the gender-biased practices are not preferable, but are still acceptable.

The situation changes for the Japanese wives when they have a child. A child or children make them a member of Korean society because of increasing opportunities to interact with Korean people. At the same time, the position as a mother changes them to be independent from Korean society because they think that they are the only source of Japanese culture for the child or children. The everyday practices of Japanese wives show the strong influence of their original, Japanese culture. The similarly gender-biased ideas allow them not to be assimilated to Korean society.

.....
Keywords: Multiculturalism, Marriage-based migrant wives, Assimilation

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Introduction: Studies of Migrant Wives in Korean Society

Multiculturalism is a relatively new but ubiquitous word in Korean society today. Along with economic development, the demands of labor increased in the middle of the 1980s, and Korea, which used to be a labor-supply country and recognized itself as an ethnically homogenous society, started to accept labor from other countries. According to the Ministry of Security and Public Administration, 1.57 million people from other countries are living in Korea today. It is more than three percent of the entire population of Korea, and 34.3 percent of them came to Korea as workers.¹ The number of marriages between Korean nationals and non-Korean nationals has also drastically increased since 1990s, and many of the couples have chosen to live in Korea after the marriage. More and more non-Korean nationals have settled down in Korea, and, as a result, Korean society has been transforming from a “mono-cultural” society to a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic society.

In Korea people call the marriage between a Korean national and a non-Korean an “international marriage.”² Korean nationals had married non-Korean nationals even before the 1990s, but these marriages did not get much attention because of the low number. For example, in 1990 international marriages accounted for only 1.2 percent

¹ Claire Lee, “Defining racism in Korea,” *The Korea Herald*, September 4, 2014. <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20140904001088> (accessed September 21, 2014).

² In previous research, scholars also used the term “transnational marriage” or “cross-border marriage” for the marriage between a Korean national and non-Korean national. People in Korea and Japan commonly call this type of marriage 국제결혼 and 国際結婚 which is literally translated as “international marriage,” and I use the term in this paper.

(4710 cases) of all marriages in Korea.³ In 2005, however, according to marriage registration statistics, international marriages increased to 13.6 percent of all marriages in Korea.⁴ The number went down to 10.5 percent in 2010, but compared to before 2000, the ratio was still very high.⁵

On top of that, the recent trend of international marriages in Korea shows a gender imbalance. Previously, the most international marriages were marriages between a non-Korean man, generally a Japanese or US citizen, and a Korean woman.⁶ After the 1990s, however, the number of international marriages between Korean men and non-Korean women exceeded those between non-Korean men and Korean women, and in most of these cases, the wives migrated to Korea. If we see the number of migrant spouses after 2005, 94 percent of them were female, and “as of 2011, 211,486 marriage migrants were living in Korea, 89.2 percent of whom were women.”⁷

Serious demographic problems, which Korean society has faced since the 1980s such as the “rural bachelor’s marriage problem,” caused an increase in migrant wives. Due to Korea’s industrialization many people including women but excluding male farmers moved to city areas to seek jobs, and, as a result, a severe shortage of brides occurred in

³ Dong-Hoon Seol, “Women Marriage Immigrants in Korea: Immigration Process and Adaptation,” *Asia-Pacific Forum* no. 33 (2006): 33.

⁴ Yaen-ju Lee, Dong-Hoon Seol, and Sung-Nam Cho, “International Marriages in South Korea: The Significance of Nationality and Ethnicity,” *Journal of Population Research* vol. 23 no. 2 (2006): 167.

⁵ Hyunok Lee, “Political Economy of Cross-Border Marriage: Economic Development and Social Reproduction in Korea,” *Feminist Economics* (2012): 178.

⁶ Seol, “Women Marriage Immigrants in Korea,” 33. According to Seol, out of the 1.2 percent of international marriages in 1990, the cases in which a Korean woman married a non-Korean man was 1.0 percent, and the case in which a Korean man married a non-Korean woman was 0.2 percent.

⁷ Lee, “Political Economy of Cross-Border Marriage,” 178.

the rural areas. On top of that due to a “cultural preference of sons” the sex ratio in Korea was skewed. In 1990 it was 116.5, the highest gap between the number of men and women in Korean history.⁸

A low fertility rate also attracted attention as a serious demographic issue. Korean women were postponing marriage and the fertility rate of Korean women has remained low, especially after the IMF crisis between 1997 and 2001. As sociologist Cho Uhn described with statistical data, the average age of first marriage by women rose from 25.7 in 1997 to 27.0 in 2002, and the crude marriage rate which showed the annual number of marriages per 1000 population declined every year.⁹ The fertility rate in Korea used to be 6.3 in the early 1960s.¹⁰ Since 1984, however, it has been under the replacement rate (2.1), the level which can sustain the population.¹¹ Its lowest level was recorded at 1.09 in 2005.¹² Although this rate recovered to 1.30 in 2012, Korea became a country with one of the lowest fertility rates in the world.¹³

⁸ Cho Uhn, “The Encroachment of Globalization into Intimate Life: The Flexible Korean Family in ‘Economic Crisis,’” *Korea Journal* Autumn (2005): 27.

⁹ Crude marriage rate is calculated by number of marriages ÷ population x 1000. If the number is high, more people got married. Cho Uhn, “The Encroachment of Globalization into Intimate Life” 12-13.

¹⁰ Eun Shil Kim, “The Cultural Logic of the Korean Modernization Project and its Gender Politics,” *Asian Journal of Women’s Studies* no. 2 (2000): 66.

¹¹ Ronald Lee, “The Demographic Transaction: Three Centuries of Fundamental Change,” *Journal of Economics Perspectives* vol. 17 (2003): 167-190.

¹² *The 2009 National Survey on Fertility, Family Health and Welfare in Korea* (Seoul: KIHASA, 2009): 141.

¹³ *World Bank Data*, http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?order=wbapi_data_value_2012+wbapi_data_value+wbapi_data_value-last&sort=asc (accessed November 5, 2014). The countries and regions which had a lower fertility rate in 2012 were Macao, San Marino, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Portugal, Hong Kong, and Singapore.

In order to solve these problems, the Korean central government and local governments have promoted international marriages between Korean men and ethnic Korean Chinese women since 1992. Later, in 1999 the government legalized marriage brokers in order to promote international marriages between Korean men and foreign women primarily from Southeast Asia.¹⁴ These demographic issues and support from the government have promoted a marriage-based female migration to Korea. Studying the international marriage in Korea from a political economist's view, Hyunok Lee showed that governmental initiatives influenced the number of migrant spouses. The number of migrant wives, especially in the case of those through marriage agents, has decreased due to the regulations such as the 2007 Act on Regulation of Marriage Brokerage Agents. Still the government supports international marriages, and the number of foreign migrant wives living in Korea has been growing.

The increasing number of foreign migrant wives, however, has shed light on a new social problem lurking in Korean society. In 1999 legally permitted marriage brokers became agents in the international marriage market, and many women from Southeast Asian countries moved to Korea as wives of Korean men. Many of them were from economically poor families and sent money to their families.¹⁵ Anthropologist Geon-

¹⁴ Hyun Mee Kim, "The State and Migrant Women: Diverging Hopes in the Making of 'Multicultural Families' in Contemporary Korea," *Korea Journal* vol. 47, no. 4 (2007): 109.

¹⁵ Danièle Bélanger and other three researchers visited Vietnamese communities from where many young ladies migrated as wives of foreigners. They described the situation of the Vietnamese migrant wives who became an important financial source for their own family. Bélanger, Danièle, Tran Giang Linh, Le Bach Duong, and Khuat Thu Hong, "Nōka no musume kara gaikokujinzuma he: Betonamu no imin sōshutu komyuniti ni okeru kekkon, ijū, genda [From a Daughter of a Farming Family to a Wife of a Foreigner: Marriage, Migration, and Gender in Vietnamese Communities Sending Migrants]," in

Soo Han described a situation of an international marriage in which a Korean man and his parents met a bride from Southeast Asia through an “unreliable marriage broker” and said that this kind of marriage often constitutes “a form of human trafficking.”¹⁶ Because the process requires that the husband’s family spend money to have the bride, these families often behave as if they bought the wife, and because of that situation, the relationship between the mother-in-law and the wife becomes similar to that between a master and a servant.

The other large discussion related to the recent international marriage is assimilation. Many scholars as well as the mass media also discuss this forced assimilation because migrant wives often feel that their in-law families as well as Korean society force them to give up their cultural values and expect them to become or act like Koreans. When promoting international marriages, the Korean government first preferred ethnic Korean Chinese (*Chosŏnjok*) because of an assumption that Korean-Chinese would be easily assimilated to Korean society. An article in the Wall Street Journal recently introduced a report by the Ansan Institute for Policy Studies saying “the government’s policies towards immigration are tougher towards nationals from countries like Uzbekistan, Vietnam, China, or the Philippines and multiculturalism policies promote ‘assimilation

Asian Women and Intimate Labor, eds. Emiko Ochiai and Kanako Akaeda (Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2012), 201-230.

¹⁶ Geon-Soo Han, “Multicultural Korea: Celebration or Challenge of Multiethnic Shift in Contemporary Korea?” *Korea Journal* (Winter 2007): 45.

rather than supporting diversity.’’¹⁷ As for these migrant wives, because of the economic imbalance between the in-laws and the wife, the wife’s power in the family remains weak. Due to this power relation the family easily forces the wife to assimilate. Some scholars and activists have expressed their frustration against the government’s attitude toward “fake” multiculturalism. The report of the Women Migrants Human Rights Center of Korea said that “these pressures are only put on women from developing Asian countries. [No Korean] would have the same expectation of white women from Western countries.”¹⁸

When it comes to discussing assimilation to Korean society, however, people tend to think of migrants from less developed countries, but there are migrant wives who are not economically disadvantaged. Indeed, there are migrant wives from Japan. If this forced assimilation really existed, what happened to the migrant wives from Japan? Japan is economically developed, but the Japanese have an Asian appearance. Japanese culture would be similar in some ways but still different from Korean culture. For the women in that condition, what kind of expectations do Korean people have or not have? In the case in which the economic power relation within the family and between countries is not an issue, does Korean family or Korean society still force or expect non-Korean wives to be assimilated? In this paper, through their daily practices, I would like

¹⁷ Annette Ekin, “South Korea Views on Race Linked to Economics,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 11, 2014, <http://blogs.wsj.com/korearealtime/2014/09/11/south-korean-views-on-race-linked-to-economics/> (accessed September 21, 2014).

¹⁸ Lee, “Defining racism in Korea.”

to explore the actual life of the migrant wives from Japan who would have been in a unique position in the multicultural family debates.

Methodology and Characteristics of Japanese Wives

In this paper I would like to focus on Japanese women who are married to Korean men and have been living in Korea (hereafter I call the group Japanese wives). For this research I combine governmental statistics compiled about multicultural families as well as previous research related to marriage-based migration, blogs created by Japanese wives, Japanese documentary programs, as well as in-depth interviews.

The research about the marriage-based migrant wives has been more active as these migrant women have become more visible in Korean society. Much of the research has analyzed the migrant wives based on nationality. For example, the Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs issued two reports, *The 2009 National Survey on Fertility, Family Health and Welfare in Korea* and *The 2009 National Survey on Multicultural Families*. Many scholars published articles related to multicultural families in Korea with contemporary statistical data, and other scholars have compared these marriages in Korea with international marriages in East and Southeast Asia using historical data. According to the statistics Japan is the third largest country sending migrant wives to Korea, although the actual number was much smaller than China and Vietnam. *The 2009 National Survey on Multicultural Families* describes how before 1990 Japan was

the largest country sending migrant wives to Korea. Because of that, the period of time living in Korea is much longer for Japanese wives than for those from other countries. These Japanese women are highly educated: 60.5 percent of them graduated from college, and 85.2 percent of them came to Korea because of their marriage. The average age difference between Japanese wives and Korean husbands was 2.3 years, and 92.7 percent of them used to work before coming to Korea.

I faced, however, a difficulty in fully using *The 2009 National Survey on Multicultural Families* and other official statistical data. Among the Japanese female survey participants, 71.8 percent of them came to Korea through a religious institution. Though scholars have not studied this phenomenon—at least in the English-language scholarship—it is commonly known that most of the Japanese wives who migrated to Korea before 1990 came through the Unification Church.¹⁹ In spite of the large number of Japanese wives having come to Korea through a religious connection, however, none of my interviewees or bloggers mentioned religion. Because it is difficult to determine how much religious belief influenced everyday practices after migration, I have excluded as research subjects the Japanese women who came to Korea through a religious connection.²⁰

¹⁹ For example, Hye-Kyung Lee, “Kankoku no imin sesaku ni okeru tabunkakazoku no yakuwari [The Role of the Multicultural Family for Korean Immigration Policy],” translated by Yuki Tsuji, in *Asian Women and Intimate Labor*, eds. Emiko Ochiai and Kanako Akaeda (Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2012), 312.

²⁰ Unfortunately I could not find reliable data for the Japanese wives who had come to Korea with a religious connection. A Japanese non-academic magazine reported that a number of Japanese female followers of the Unification Church moved to rural areas of Korea after match-making and that they have financial difficulties. However, the survey did not specify which religious connection these Japanese wives used, and there was no statistical data focusing on only these wives.

Second, in order to understand daily practices as many as Japanese wives, I checked blogs written by these women. Japanese women living in Korea commonly use blogs as a tool to be connected with other Japanese people in Korea. Many of them posted comments on the blog, such as “I am looking for friends in the similar situation (Japanese migrant wives in Korea).” Also, among the Japanese bloggers, they created groups with something in common, for example a group of Japanese wives who are living in the western part of Seoul or a group of mothers whose child is a “half” between Korean and Japanese and was born in 2012. Some of the on-line groups seem to have meetings once in a while. In *The 2009 National Survey on Multicultural Families* also showed the closely tied Japanese migrant wives networks. Almost half of the Japanese wives who had participated in the survey answered that they mainly discussed personal issues with people from the same country.²¹ Additionally, in the same survey, compared to the migrant wives from other countries, Japanese wives answered less to the question “there is no friend to spent leisure or hobby time together,” and 36.8 percent of people answered that they spend this time with friends from the same country.²² Japanese wives are well-connected, and the blog postings are relevant sources for this research.

Since the number of the bloggers is large, however, I decided to limit the number of blogs to those who have a child or children. I found that their postings often directly depicted their relationship with Korean society, for example their roles in their

²¹ *The 2009 National Survey on Multicultural Families*, 465.

²² *The 2009 National Survey on Multicultural Families*, 469.

husband's family or their thoughts on child education. Among them, some are very active and public, participating in blog ranking, while others did not post new entries for a few years.²³ Usually these bloggers include links to blogs by their friends, so by following these links, I saw 144 blogs by Japanese wives who have had a child or children between June 2014 and August 2014. I use this information to determine a general sense of their everyday practices.

I supplemented these blogs with internet websites for Japanese residents in Korea and Japanese travelers to Korea. These sites interviewed Japanese people working in Korea including Japanese wives

Third, I used a 2011 documentary program broadcast in Japan, whose title was "the non-fiction, after marrying into Korea."²⁴ The documentary filmed three Japanese women who had married Korean men or were going to marry a Korean man and followed them for five years to depict their life in Korea. Due to the Korean wave in Japan, Korea became much more emotionally closer for many Japanese people, but the documentary tried to show the different way of thinking or behaviors in Korea through the experiences and struggles of these migrant wives. The opinions which these three Japanese wives expressed in the program had something in common with Japanese bloggers.

²³ Blog ranking is the ranking of how many people saw the blog held by "Blog Village." There are various blog categories, and there are webpages based on the category, such as a blog ranking of "raising children abroad" or "life in Korea." Each category has a ranking system, and if a blogger registers to one or more categories, the blog is more likely to be seen by many people and the blogger sees the rank based on the number of the viewers.

²⁴ The Japanese title of the documentary was "ザ・ノンフィクション ぶっちゃけ! 韓国に嫁いで,"

Lastly, I conducted in-depth interviews with 11 Japanese wives between January 2014 and October 2014. I mainly used my personal network, such as a Korean language class which I attended. Some of them are my friend's friends, and some of them I have met from volunteer work. In addition to these in-depth interviews, I also gained some information through casual conversations with Japanese women or during presentations in language classes by Japanese wives, instead of face-to-face interviews. Because of the narrow range of my personal network, all of them lived in Seoul or the greater Seoul area. All of them can communicate with Korean people in Korean language, although half of them still take Korean language lessons. One has been living in Korea for more than 17 years, and another has lived here just three years. Some of them came to Korea to work and met their future Korean husband, and others came to Korea after marrying a Korean husband who they had met either in Japan or overseas.

Through the research of blogs, Japanese TV programs, books, and interviews, I learned that many Korean-Japanese couples had met in a third country. Among the 144 bloggers, 36 percent of them did not mention where they had met, but 19 percent met in Korea, 18 percent met in Japan, and 26 percent met in a third country, mainly English speaking countries. Many of the Japanese wives had lived outside of Japan before the marriage.

Assimilation in Korea

The term assimilation is often translated as *donghwa* in Korean, and the term would remind some Korean people of the colonial period by Japanese Empire. In his book, *Assimilating Seoul*, an American historian Todd Henry described how the colonizers from Japan attempted to spiritually and materially assimilate “space” in Seoul. During the colonial period, the nationality of the people in Korea was “Japanese.” In the book Henry used the case of a Shinto shrine built in Namsan: the Japanese colonizer “encouraged [Koreans] to become loyal subjects of the Japanese emperor.”²⁵

Therefore, from a Korean perspective, *donghwa* has a negative connotation, and many scholars and activists supporting marriage-based migrant wives use the term assimilation negatively. For example, describing a case in which a Korean mother-in-law threw out a foreign dish cooked by a Vietnamese daughter-in-law, a Korean anthropologist Geon-Soo Han described how “marriage-based migrants ... are ... subject to the demands for assimilation.”²⁶ In this case, abandoning non-Korean food traditions is seen as a necessary step to become Korean.

Scholars and mass media frequently use the term “assimilation” to portray the situation of a minority, but the definitions of the term have changed over time. Assimilation has been discussed in many countries, especially in the case of male immigrants to the United States. In an article from 1997, the sociologists Richard Alba

²⁵ Todd Henry, *Assimilating Seoul* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 5.

²⁶ Han, “Multicultural Korea,” 45.

and Victor Nee reviewed the historical definitions of the term “assimilation.”²⁷ In their introductory sociology textbook from 1921, the Chicago School sociologists Robert E. Park and E.W. Burgess defined assimilation as “a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons and groups and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life.”²⁸ Alba and Nee show how this definition “equates assimilation with the social processes that bring ethnic minorities into the mainstream” and assumes that assimilation is “the end-stage of a ‘race-relations’ cycle of contact, competition, accommodation, and eventual assimilation.”²⁹ In 1964 American sociologist and author of *Assimilation in American Life* Milton Gordon broke down the assimilation process into a series of stages. He said that this process inevitably started with “acculturation, the minority group’s adoption of the ‘cultural patterns’ of the host society.”³⁰ Moreover, the “acculturation was a largely one-way process . . . the minority group adopted the core culture, which remained . . . basically unchanged by this absorption.”³¹

These theories were criticized later because of their portrayal of the inevitability of the assimilation process and their assumption of the solidity of the mainstream

²⁷ Richard Alba and Victor Nee, “Rethinking Assimilation Theory for a New Era of Immigration,” *International Migration Review* vol. 31 no.4 (1997): 828.

²⁸ Robert E. Park and E.W. Burgess, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969 [reprint of the 1921 edition]), as cited in Alba and Nee, “Rethinking Assimilation Theory for a New Era of Immigration,” 828.

²⁹ Alba and Nee, “Rethinking Assimilation Theory for a New Era of Immigration,” 828.

³⁰ Alba and Nee, “Rethinking Assimilation Theory for a New Era of Immigration,” 829.

³¹ Alba and Nee, “Rethinking Assimilation Theory for a New Era of Immigration,” 830.

culture.³² More recently, in his 2013 book, the Princeton sociologist Andreas Wimmer developed a model for reinterpreting assimilation as a process of “ethnic boundary making.”³³ Despite the definitions or models used, the previous discourses on assimilation most likely have influenced the discussion of assimilation in Korea.

What is assimilation for Korean people as well as for foreign wives living in Korea? When Korean men started having Korean-Chinese wives after 1992 when Korea and China normalized relations, Korean families had a specific assumption toward the ethnically Korean wives from China. Examining the problem of assimilation in Korea, the political scientist Timothy Lim illustrated the assumption which Korean-Chinese brides “were expected to be subservient, dutiful and (almost) wholly ‘Korean’ wives.”³⁴ An anthropologist Caren Freeman also described the pressure which Korean-Chinese wives received from their in-law families. One of the interviewees, who had married a Korean farmer, did not expect “the cultural imperative to serve her in-laws and husband.”³⁵ Another Korean-Chinese wife, whose husband used to work in China and married him for love, complained “If I do something well, she [the mother-in-law] thinks it’s to be expected. But if I do something wrong, she thinks it’s because I’m from

³² Alba and Nee, “Rethinking Assimilation Theory for a New Era of Immigration,” 830.

³³ Andreas Wimmer, *Ethnic Boundary Making: Institutions, Power, Networks* (London: Oxford University Press, 2013), 18.

³⁴ Timothy Lim, “Rethinking Belongingness in Korea: Transnational Migration, ‘Migrant Marriages’ and the Politics of Multiculturalism,” *Pacific Affairs* vol. 83, no. 1 (2010): 51.

³⁵ Caren Freeman, “Marrying Up and Marrying Down: The Paradoxes of Marital Mobility for Chosŏnjok Brides in South Korea,” in *Cross-Border Marriages: Gender and Mobility in Transnational Asia*, eds. Nicole Constable (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 89.

China.”³⁶ It seems that Korean people shared an expectation that Korean-Chinese women would be assimilated to Korean society, although it failed. Many couples divorced or Korean-Chinese wives ran away.

The expectation for a daughter-in-law to be subservient and dutiful was demanded not only to Korean-Chinese women. An account by one Filipina migrant wife illustrated the struggle of marriage-based migrant wives in Korea. May Cordova described her feelings and ideas of Korean and her original cultures as

we always have a trouble about the cultural and some family problems. Most of Koreans are forcing us [foreign wives] ... to follow their culture. Yeah, we did, but the trouble is that they want us to forget our culture for the reason we married them, but for me that's the big cause of problems of migrant married couples.³⁷

According to her, adapting “Korean culture” was not enough, but the Korean family forced foreign wives to give up their original culture.

Not only from the in-law family but the migrant would have felt the pressure from their new community. The Korea Herald introduced a case of a “devoted daughter-in-law award” held by a local NGO in 2009. A 29-year-old Vietnamese migrant wife “received the prize for taking care of her intellectually disabled Korean husband, nursing her ill parents-in-law, as well as her grandmother-in-law, on top of doing farm

³⁶ Freeman, “Marrying Up and Marrying Down,” 96.

³⁷ Lim, “Rethinking Belongingness in Korea,” 68.

work and domestic labor all at the same time.”³⁸ The same article reported that the Women Migrants Human Right Center of Korea described this award as a misguided image of a daughter-in-law who “should diligently fulfill her duties as daughter-in-law in Korea’s male-oriented families, in spite of them being foreigners.”³⁹ For the people who gave the prize to her, this was a role model of a daughter-in-law.

The Korean government also played an important role in promoting assimilation of foreign wives into Korean society. For example, in Ho Chi Minh City migrant wives sometimes take lessons which were funded annually from the equivalent of 80,000 to 100,000 US dollars by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family of Korea before coming to Korea.⁴⁰ A few newspaper articles reported on this “how-to-be-a-good-Korean-wife” class, describing how the eight-hour “orientation” was “not mandatory, but the certificate that women get for the course helps with their visa process.”⁴¹ According to a Vietnamese reporter working for Al Jazeera, the wall of the classroom had a poster of the Vietnamese phrase “Keep in mind! Rice goes on the left, soup to the right when setting the table,” and girls-to-be-brides studied the differences between Korean and Vietnamese child-rearing.⁴² The reporter claimed that he classes had been

³⁸ Lee, “Defining racism in Korea.”

³⁹ Lee, “Defining racism in Korea.”

⁴⁰ Lien Hoang, “Vietnamese study to be ‘perfect Korean wives,’” *Al Jazeera America*. December 4, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/12/2012123122810326420.html> (accessed September 24, 2014).

⁴¹ Chico Harlan, “Bride school: Where South Korea’s mail-order wives learn their trade,” *The Washington Post*, January 11, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/bride-school-where-south-koreas-mail-order-wives-learn-their-trade/2014/07/14/74d4e5b4-b71d-475b-9b36-c7c2f83266dd_story.html (accessed November 3, 2014).

⁴² Hoang, “Vietnamese study to be ‘perfect Korean wives.’”

created because of “high divorce rates among South Korean men and foreign wives, domestic violence, and family instability.”⁴³

Even after coming to Korea, most programs to support migrant wives are “diverted into efforts to assist in their assimilation into Korean culture.”⁴⁴ Although one would assume that multiculturalism would mean the coexistence of multiple cultures, Korean sociologist Hyun Mee Kim has pointed out that “what the Korean government wants from the multicultural family is a family based on traditional family values, that is, one that upholds patriarchy and emphasizes reproduction.”⁴⁵

Gender, whether becoming a wife or a daughter-in-law, strongly influenced the discussions. Assimilation here takes gender into account and means that the foreign migrant wives need to act like “Korean” women with “traditional Korean etiquette” and “Korean language.” They are supposed to “diligently” “fulfill domestic work” to “take care of the husband’s family” by “accepting Korean male-oriented family” idea, and “forgetting their original culture.” In those cases, for the foreign wives, the characteristics of their original cultures were completely excluded from the discussion, but a female role as a wife and a daughter-in-law was emphasized.

On the other hand, as it is in Singapore, Japan, and Taiwan, the situation of Korean women has been changing. Korean women have prolonged their education and have raised their expectations about the characteristics of a suitable marriage partner,

⁴³ Hoang, “Vietnamese study to be ‘perfect Korean wives.’”

⁴⁴ Han, “Multicultural Korea,” 35.

⁴⁵ Hyun Mee Kim, “The State and Migrant Women,” 101.

especially after the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997. Korean women now refuse to accept the “traditionalist views of women’s roles and appropriate behavior.”⁴⁶ Sociologists Kyung-Sup Chang and Min-Young Song described the new practices by Korean women as “individualization without individualism.”⁴⁷ They still keep Korean patriarchal ideas in their mind, but the actual practices became individualistic. Because of this shift in the attitudes of Korean women, men, especially those in rural areas, have difficulties finding a bride, and have turned to wives from other countries. These women who are expected to act as the replacement of the ideal “Korean” woman that the Korean man or his parents imagine.⁴⁸ Hyun Mee Kim called this process the “maintenance and reproduction of Korean family.”⁴⁹ Instead of female Korean nationals, foreign migrant wives are now required to play the role of “traditional women to answer to the call of family continuity [of Korea].”⁵⁰ Because of their often precarious financial situation

⁴⁶ Gavin Jones and Hsiu-hua Shen, “International marriage in East and Southeast Asia: Trends and Research Emphases,” *Citizenship Studies* (2008): 16.

⁴⁷ Kyung-Sup Chang and Min-Young Song, “The Stranded Individualizer under Compressed Modernity: South Korean Women in Individualization without Individualism,” *British Journal of Sociology* vol. 61 no. 3 (2010): 539-564.

⁴⁸ Jones and Shen, “International marriage in East and Southeast Asia,” 15. This shows that international marriages have also increased within Japan, Singapore, and Taiwan, where governments are allowing the migration of brides from China, Vietnam, and the Philippines. Like Korea, these countries are commonly struggling to raise the fertility rate, and many men in these countries face “problems in the domestic marriage market.”

⁴⁹ Kim, “The State and Migrant Women,” 108.

⁵⁰ Nancy Abelmann and Hyunhee Kim, “A Failed Attempt at Transnational Marriage: Maternal Citizenship in a Globalizing South Korea,” in *Cross-Border Marriages: Gender and Mobility in Transnational Asia*, eds. Nicole Constable (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 101-123. In the article they described a situation of a Korean mother who became deeply involved in a bride search from the Philippines for her disabled son. Hyun Mee Kim, “The State and Migrant Women,” 101.

before the marriage and their gender, Geon-Soo Han described the situation of these migrant women as “double fettered.”⁵¹

Yet it seems that somehow wives from North American or European countries do not experience this financial and gender discrimination. *The 2009 National Survey on Multicultural Families* categorized these women in one group, maybe because of the relatively small number, and the group showed completely different characteristics. Most research papers have neglected these women, depicting them simply as group whose experience is very different from the wives from Southeast Asian countries. For example, the Korea Herald reported that “when a Korean person is married to a (white) citizen of Western country, his or her family is referred to as a ‘global family’ with a positive connotation by TV program hosts, while families consisting of a Korean man married to a woman from a Southeast Asian country is called a ‘multicultural family,’ a term that is rather stigmatizing and discriminatory among Koreans.”⁵² People imagine that the wives from Western countries are superior or are treated differently, even when they came to Korea as migrant wives.

The newspaper article did not make clear in which category—either “global” or “multicultural”—Japanese wives belong to. While they come from an economically wealthier country, they have an ethnically East Asian appearance. A way to situate Japanese women between the “global” Western wives and the “multicultural”

⁵¹ Han, “Multicultural Korea,” 44.

⁵² Lee, “Defining racism in Korea.”

Vietnamese, Filipina, and Cambodian wives is to compare their attitudes towards acquiring Korean nationality.⁵³

A 2009 survey shows that the situation of Japanese women is more similar to women from North America, Europe and Australia, with the striking difference that more of them intend to live permanently in Korea (table 1). While the statistics shows that the longer migrant wives stay in Korea the more they acquire Korean nationality, only 5.3 percent of the Japanese wives who had participated in the survey had changed their nationality, in spite of their length of stay in Korea. Many migrant wives from Southeast Asian countries showed their intention to change their nationality to Korean, but almost half of the Japanese wives answered to acquire permanent resident visa.

Table1: Plan to acquire Korean nationality

	Already acquired	Planning to acquire	Planning to acquire only permanent residence	Not planning to acquire	Do not know
Vietnam	12.5	89.8	2.1	0.6	7.4
The Philippines	43.6	74.4	10.5	1.9	13.2
Cambodia	6.3	90.7	4.0	1.2	4.1
Japan	5.3	13.4	47.3	3.5	35.8
North America, Europe, Australia	7.1	6.5	30.8	22.8	40.0

Source: The 2009 National Survey on Multicultural Families

⁵³ Since the Korean government does not allow people to have dual nationalities, if a migrant wife acquires Korean nationality, it means that they lose their original nationality.

Through the survey the Japanese wives showed their adherence to Japanese nationality. It depends on how these Japanese wives think of nationality, but it is possible that they think of Japanese nationality as their identity, and that changing nationality would make them feel that they have to give up their identity.

In his book *Ethnic Boundary Making*, Wimmer describes the “sociopsychological process of identification” in ways that could apply to these Japanese women:

When members of an ethnic category self-identify and are identified by others as ‘belonging’ to a ‘group’ with little ambiguity, when they share easy-to-identify cultural repertoires of thinking and acting, and when they are tied together by strong alliances in day-to-day politics, we expect strong emotional attachment to such ethnic categories. Ethnic identity will be ‘thicker’ than in other contexts, and group members will be prepared to incur high costs to defend the culture and honor of their community and the authenticity of its culture thus stabilizing a boundary even in situations of profound social change.⁵⁴

Holding Japanese nationality would alienate them from Korean society and allow them to see Korean society as an outsider. If so, the Japanese wives choose to be Japanese, instead of becoming Korean. Through the interviews, none of them showed their

⁵⁴ Wimmer, *Ethnic Boundary Making*, 105.

intention to change the nationality, and most of them had not thought of it.⁵⁵ In terms of nationality the Japanese wives had a power to decide and do not feel any pressure to change it.

Is It a Choice for Japanese Wives to Be or Not to Be Assimilated?

If the Japanese wives do not feel much that they are forced to be assimilated, is it a choice for Japanese wives to be or not to be assimilated? From my interviews and readings of blogs, it seems that Korean families do not actively interfere in the nationality issue of Japanese wives. Then, how about their everyday practices? Through the interviews I found that the Japanese wives see Korean culture and behavior as foreign. Even a Japanese wife who had lived 17 years in Korea still finds her Japanese part often and judges Korean behaviors. Japanese people often talk about the close personal distance of Korean people, which is more intense than the Japanese “standard.” A few interviewees told me that they could still not get used to Korean people coming into her apartment or by opening a refrigerator without asking permission. They often get puzzled or frustrated by “Korean” behavior, and when they meet Japanese friends they discuss or complain about these issues together in Japanese. They see Korean society from an outsider’s point of view.

⁵⁵ Before 1984, Japanese nationality law did not allow women to maintain Japanese nationality when they married non-Japanese men. They had to change to the nationality of the husband’s country. All of the interviewees got married with their husbands after 1984, and they still maintain Japanese nationality today.

In terms of their everyday practices, some Japanese wives told me that their behaviors became “Koreanized.” Their examples included making an appointment with friends at the last-minute or standing up early when they get off from a bus. They realize their behavior when their family or friends in Japan point it out or a Japanese bus driver tell them not to, and even when they notice such “Koreanized” behaviors, they do not think it came from assimilation but more like an adaptation to a new environment. They do not understand these behaviors to be forced.

In order to see more detailed practices of their everyday life, I chose three specific situations in which these Japanese wives interact with Korean people. First, I would like to see their working situation, especially their attitude toward job searching. Second, I would like to see how Japanese wives establish relationships with in-law families, especially during Korean traditional events, such as the Lunar New Year and the Korean Thanksgiving (*chuseok*). Third, I would like to see how Japanese wives act when they give a birth and what they think of education for their child or children.

1. Everyday Practice: Job Searching

One of the opportunities where Japanese wives encounter local Korean people is in work place. *The 2009 National Survey on Multicultural Families* showed that 92.7 percent of Japanese marriage-based migrants, which include male migrants, used to have a job before coming to Korea. Since the Korean government grants a status which

allows them to work in Korea like other Korean nationals, there are no legal obstacles for them to find a job.⁵⁶

The statistical data shows that 35.9 percent of Japanese marriage-based migrants have a job in Korea, and among them 39.2 percent work as a skilled worker. The survey did not specify the occupations, but from the interviews and other my own survey, many of them are likely working as professional Japanese language teachers. Although the number would not be so large, there were also hair dressers, licensed baby-sitters, English language teachers, and freelance translators. In many cases, Japanese wives did not change their occupation before and after the migration. One of my interviewees told me that she came to Korea to have experiences as a Japanese language teacher and met her Korean husband. Other than these skilled workers, there were some self-employed Japanese wives, for example, running a private export business or supporting an in-law family business.

The statistical data, at the same time, showed that 64.1 percent of them do not have a job today. In the survey, there was a question asking about the difficulties to work in Korea, and 19.9 percent of the marriage-based Japanese migrants answered that there were no difficulties. While many of marriage-based migrants from other countries, except for ethnic Korean-Chinese, picked language as a difficulty, relatively few Japanese marriage-based migrant chose it. Through the interviews, I learned that many of the Japanese wives intended to become an employed worker. Among the

⁵⁶ The number includes those who came to Korea through a religious connection.

interviewees, however, most of those who did not have a job at that time and were hoping to have a job in the future, told me that they had not actively searched for a job by sending a resume or having an interview. In spite of their intention to work, their attitude toward the job search was very passive.

What they had faced was the reality of a very tight job market in Korea. Through their daily conversation with family or Japanese friends, they learned how Korean people prepared for job hunting. For example, in Korea people looking for a job strongly believed in the so-called “specs, meaning “a list of activities and/or certifications that applicants include on their resumes . . . [such as] high TOEIC scores, internship experiences, social and/or volunteer activities . . . to impress their potential employers in Korea.”⁵⁷ They lose their confidence, because they do not have enough “spec.”

When they take a look at job postings, Japanese wives often use internet sites. Konest and Job Korea are the popular sites, and I checked the job posting in the sites. Most of the available jobs are part-time servers in Japanese restaurants, and there are few full-time positions. In that case the hourly wage is low, especially compared to the wages in Japan, and there is little social benefit. Moreover, one of the interviewees told me that these jobs have age limitation. For some of my interviewees, especially those who had previous work experience and came to Korea due to marriage, these available

⁵⁷ Ji-Yoon Kim, “Story, the ‘Spec-free’ Recruitment Trend on the Rise,” *Hanyangian.com*, <http://www.hanyangian.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=338> (accessed November 5, 2014).

jobs were neither desirable nor suitable because of the working conditions and the age restriction.

At the same time, in some cases, their husbands or husbands' families do not expect the Japanese wives to work outside of home. Some of the interviewees told me that before moving to Korea they had told their husbands that they would be helpless in Korea, and the husbands answered that they would not have to work if they did not want to. It does not necessarily mean that the husband or his family is rich, but simply that the Japanese wives were not expected to earn money: the expectation to be a paid worker is low. One interviewee, on the other hand, told me that her parents-in-law did not want her to do menial or unskilled labor. When she came to Korea, she worked as a freelance Japanese language teacher working on an hourly basis. She did not have experience as a Japanese language teacher, so it was more like a conversation partner. The parents-in-law did not say anything about it, but when she mentioned that she wanted to work in a coffee shop or do some part-time work, they told her that she could not do it. She explained to me that for her parents-in-law being a language teacher was OK because they considered it as a respected position, even if it was actually a conversation partner. On the other hand, something like a coffee shop worker was not acceptable for them. Again, some Korean families did not expect Japanese wives to earn money but if the Japanese wives want to work, the families wanted them to have a respected job. These conditions discourage Japanese wives from having a job.

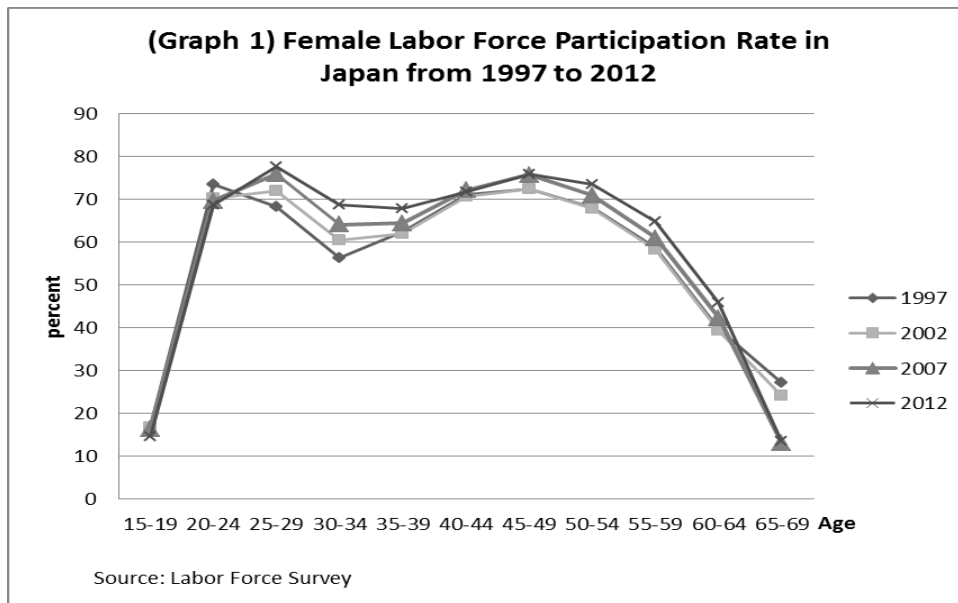
Also, it seems that the Japanese women tend to underestimate their working experience before marriage. Through the interviews, I felt that they did not take their working experience as either an actual career or as an advantage on the job market. Because of that they think that they are not “qualified” enough. Instead, they think that their Japanese language ability is their only advantage. However, due to the large number of Korean people speaking Japanese well, being a native Japanese speaker does not help them in searching a job. Or at least they feel that way. One interviewee told me that she should have acquired some skills like a Japanese language teacher’s license, although she had previously worked in the international trade department of a cosmetic company in Japan. It seems that one of or a combination of these reasons weakened their confidence and made them feel valueless in the Korean job market.

Why then do these women devalue their career? I would like to examine the issue from the perspective of their society of origin, Japan. In Japan people who newly graduate from high school or university have the best chance to get a full-time job. Every year companies start a hiring process at the same time due to an agreement, and the newly hired workers start working at the same time in spring, usually April 1. Traditionally each Japanese corporation trains the new workers, including inculcating them in its corporate culture, and most of the companies make use of so-called “Seniority-Based” Promotion. The longer you work for the company, the higher salary you get. In other words, if you quit a full-time position with social benefits position that

you got after graduation, it would be very hard to get a job with the same working conditions.

More and more Japanese women received high education and had more opportunities to get a job with the same condition as men, but they still quit a job when they get married or give a birth. Recently most women do not quit a job due to marriage but still many of them have to leave because of child birth and home care. Because of this trend, the Japanese female labor force graph shows an “M” figure curve in Japan. (See graph 1)

This phenomena shows that Japanese women enter the job market after graduation from colleges or high schools, but because these women leave the work place after marriage or child birth, the female labor force goes down drastically between the ages of 30 and 35. After the children grow up, however, these women want to go back to the job market, so the female labor force increases.



When these women return to the job market, it is not easy for them to have a full time job with benefits. Instead, they must settle for a less secure part time job. In Japan part-time job does not mean that a worker works for fewer hours. The main differences between full-time worker and part-time worker are the job security and pay system. The market value of women who leave a company systematically drops, and, of course, women commonly share this information. A Japanese sociologist Emiko Ochiai has analyzed the division of women's lifestyles in Japan. According to her, Japanese women enter into one of "three categories: one for housewives, one for women on an elite path in pursuit of a career, and one for part-time workers and ...[women] engage in irregular or unstable employment."⁵⁸ Since the Japanese wives in Korea did not pursue the elite path, the choices left are being a housewife or an unstable part-time worker. This female working situation would be the reason why Japanese wives in Korea devalue their working experiences. The culture of female workplace in Japan strongly influences the behavior of Japanese wives even after they move to Korea.

At the same time, Korean society also needs to accept the wives' behavior. In various countries researchers have studied Japanese wives who moved to other countries due to marriage.⁵⁹ For example, Leng Leng Thang, Miho Goda, and Elizabeth MacLachlan interviewed Japanese women living in Singapore for a study on the relationship between their identity and work. Through the interviews of the Japanese

⁵⁸ Emiko Ochiai, "Leaving the West, Rejoining the East? Gender and Family in Japan's Semi-compressed Modernity," *International Sociology* (2014): 219.

⁵⁹ For example, Kayko Okamura studied Japanese diaspora and their children in Germany, focusing on the relationship between being Japanese and learning about Japan, and Naoko Maehara researched how Japanese migrant wives in Ireland had experienced their emotional process at their life transition.

marriage-based migrant wives, they discovered that these women feel pressure to have a job because it is common that women work after marriage and childbirth in Singapore. One interviewee said that as long as you have a working visa, you have opportunities to find a job at any age, and actually many of Japanese wives in Singapore had a job.⁶⁰ It shows that the hosting society's practices also influence the Japanese wives' behavior. Actually Korean society also has a similar tendency on female work force participation. Compared to other Asian and European countries, Ochiai found out that "only South Korea shows the same 'M' shame pattern on female labor force participation as Japan."⁶¹ The practices of married women are not foreign in Korean society.

From Japanese wives' everyday practice of job searching, I found that they were receiving some influence from their original culture as well as from the new culture. It would be hard to say which has a stronger influence between the original and new society, but because of the influence from the original culture, Japanese wives saw little pressure to be assimilated to Korean society.

2. Everyday Practice: Roles as a daughter-in-law (며느리)

Korean society is often described as a male-centered society influenced by Confucian traditional understandings of gender roles. A sociologist Sirin Sung has described unpaid work by women in Korean society in these terms: "although the

⁶⁰ Leng Leng Thang, Miho Goda, and Elizabeth MacLachlan, "Negotiating work and self: experiences of Japanese working women in Singapore," in *Japanese Diasporas: Unsung Past, Conflicting Presents, and Uncertain Futures*, eds. Nobuko Adachi (London: Routledge, 2006), 239.

⁶¹ Ochiai, "Leaving the West, Rejoining the East?" 215.

Confucian traditional family system has faded somewhat, the Confucian notion of women's subordination to their husbands and to all members of the family-in-law remains strong in the Korean family unit."⁶² "One of the main characteristics of Confucian patriarchy is the obedience of the daughter-in-law to their parents-in-law."⁶³

The heavy load of female labor can be seen in traditional Korean events, such as Korean Thanksgiving, the Lunar New Year, and ancestral memorial service (*chesa*). In Korea, family members get together in the house of the head of the family to celebrate New Year and Korean Thanksgiving or to remember the ancestors. The oldest son inherits heavily traditional duties, and a wife of the oldest son has to handle these events once in a while. Even if the wives are Japanese and are unfamiliar with these Korean traditional events as well as the roles played by women during the events, they have the same duties. Female family members prepare the food for the events for days and keep working during the events. As many interviewees told me, it varies from family to family how to manage these traditional events. Some families, especially household of the oldest son, still take it seriously, and others exercise it in a simpler way. Most of the interviewees lived separately with their parents-in-law, and they visit in-law-families to help other female family members.

At the same time, some Japanese wives feel enormous pressure to act like a good Korean wife. One of the Japanese wives in the Japanese documentary program married

⁶² Sirin Sung, "Women Reconciling Paid and Unpaid Work in a Confucian Welfare State: The Case of South Korea," *Social Policy & Administration* vol. 37 no. 4 (2003): 348.

⁶³ Sung, "Women Reconciling Paid and Unpaid Work in a Confucian Welfare State," 346.

the oldest son of his family. They had met in Canada, and she moved to Korea for the marriage. In Korea the position of the oldest son is in the center of family, and his wife is in charge of work to prepare for family events. The program showed her everyday life and her struggle to be a good wife, mother, and daughter-in-law. Her husband expressed his frustration with her, because he thought she could not or did not try to understand the importance of family in Korean society. He pointed out that he was thinking of a family as one entity but she thought of a family in a different way as a collective of individuals. He sometimes furiously tried to convince her to follow the Korean way. Later in the documentary, she said it was impossible to think in that way but promised to try to work harder.

When I conducted interviews of Japanese wives to ask about their everyday practices, however, almost all of them said, more than once, that “it depends on a person or family.” For the research, I wanted to see how Japanese wives see the Korean society in general, but unlike the previous researches of the marriage-based migrant wives from Southeast Asian countries, the Japanese interviewees did not describe Korean families as an entity and their experiences as a common issue among Japanese wives. Some of them had heard of the TV program, and they said that some wives had a harder time than others.

While people commonly described these traditional Korean rituals, it is gradually changing or is not as solid as before. Fewer Korean people spend the New Year or the Korean Thanksgiving with their family, and some take the time to travel abroad. This

year one newspaper survey showed that “more than 78 percent of 142 married respondents said they would not visit their parents this Korean Thanksgiving.”⁶⁴ Among the interviewees, one told me that her mother-in-law, who is not a wife of the oldest son, always tries to visit the in-law family at the last minute to avoid the female duties. Another one said that her mother-in-law had told her that she did not have to inherit the ritual in the future. It seems that the ways to celebrate the traditional events have been and will be changing.

However, if the husband’s family exercises the traditional ritual, the wives who are daughters-in-law from the parents’ point of view, cannot avoid it. The interviewees described their role in the family event. Some of them said they feel useless every time participating in traditional events because they do not know anything. Others told me that they usually do simple work, such as washing dishes or frying food, following the directions by their mothers-in-law. More than one Japanese wife told me that their mother-in-law understood their situation in which they did not know how to act in these events.

Yet at the same time the Japanese women somehow feel sympathy to the other female family members. Describing the hard work by female family members, the Japanese wives showed a respect to their mother-in-law. The image of mother-in-law they described was slightly different from the one which scholars and migrants from Southeast Asia frequently depicted. One of the interviewees said she was visiting her in-

⁶⁴ Woo-young Lee, “Chuseok for Modern Korean families: Traditional Holiday Customs Scaled Down as Family Values Undergo Changes,” *The Korea Herald*, September 5, 2014. <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20140905000909> (accessed October 1, 2014).

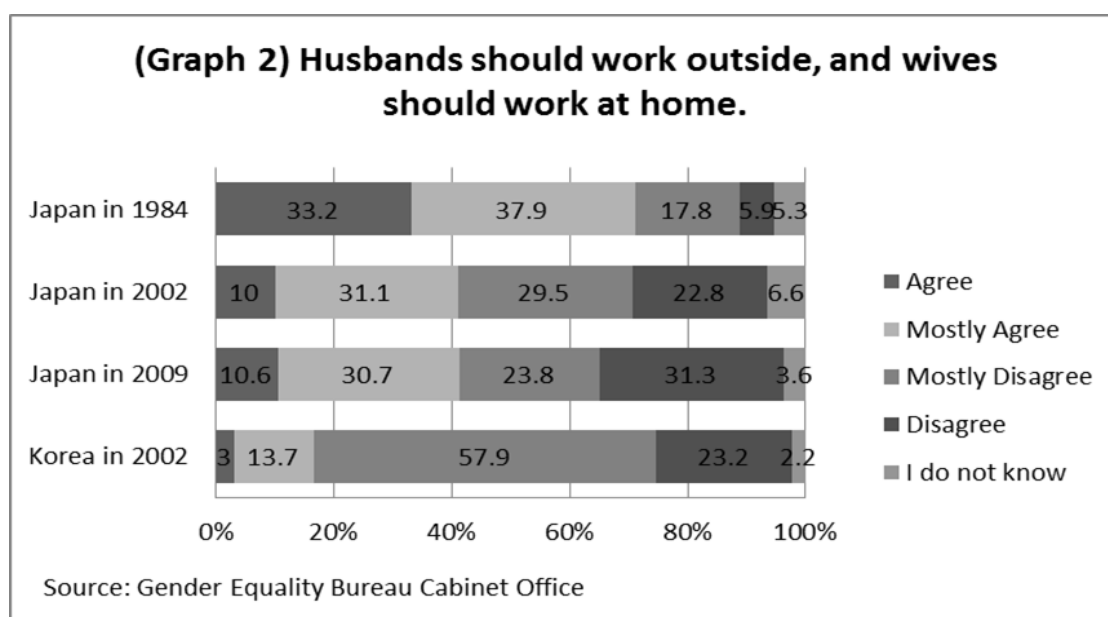
law-family for the traditional events because if she does not go, other female members of the family have to work more.

One of the interviewees even told me that because her mother-in-law, who is not a wife of the oldest son, does not play a role of a daughter-in-law, she does not have a chance to learn these customs so far. Compared to other Japanese wives who have been working hard to participate in these rituals with their in-law family, she said that other wives would think that she was lucky, but it is tough for her as well. During these events she feels isolated. She said she might never appreciate nor understand these traditional events, but she understands it is important for Korean society.

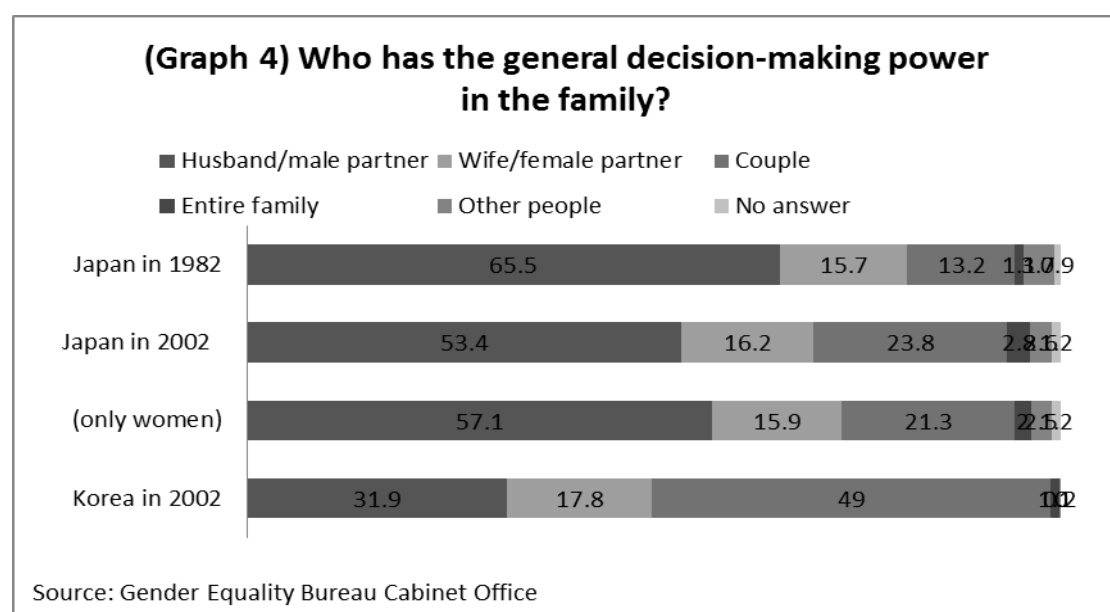
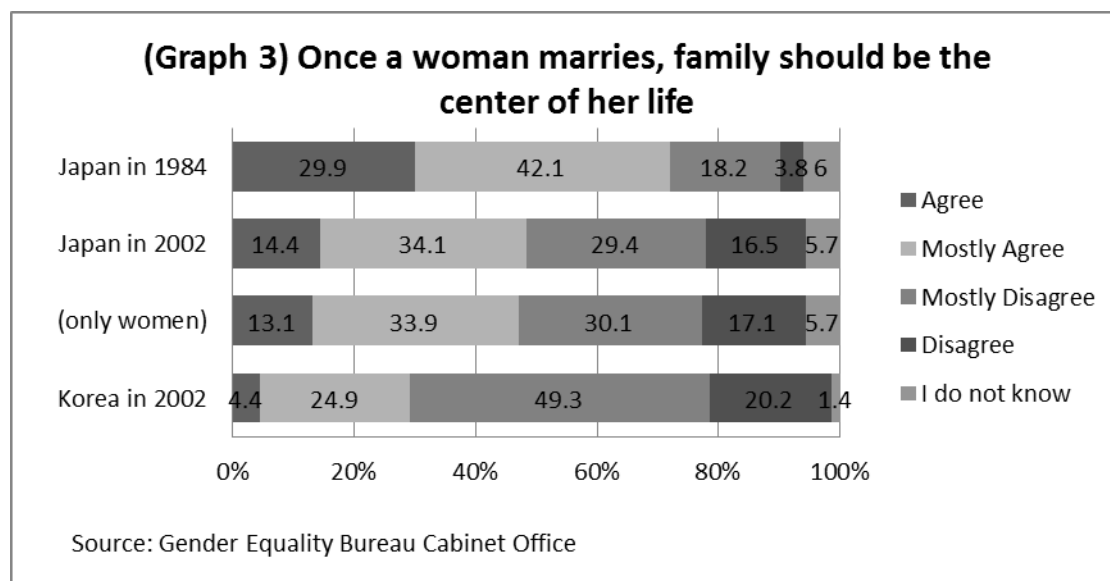
The sympathy to mother-in-law or female family member by the Japanese wives would be understandable because the male-centered tradition is familiar for them. Japan is or used to be similar with the Korean society. The idea of “good-wife-wise-mother” exists in their mind. Although scholars have already shown that the idea came from Western society, many of Japanese still believe that it is a Japanese tradition, and Japanese wives try to follow the tradition.⁶⁵ In 2002 Japanese government conducted an international survey to see people’s idea related to gender. It covered Korea, the Philippines, the United States, Sweden, Germany, and the United Kingdom and showed how Japanese people had been thinking of division of labor based on gender, woman’s position after marriage, and decision-making power in family, compared to other

⁶⁵ Ochiai, Emiko, “Shinmitsusei no rōdō to ajia josei no kōchiku [Intimate Labor and construction of Asian Women],” in *Ajia josei to shinmitsusei no rōdō [Asian Women and Intimate Labor]*, eds. Emiko Ochiai and Kanako Akaeda (Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2012), 13.

countries.⁶⁶ Graph 2 and 3 shows how historically Japanese people strongly believed the division of labor based on gender. In 1984, more than 70 percent of people agreed or mostly agreed with the idea that a woman should work at home and had preference which family should be the center of a married woman. In 2002, the number got largely reduced, but nearly 50 percent of people think that a married woman should focus on family. There was a similar survey in 2009 including the same question of graph 2, and more than 40 percent of Japanese people agreed with the idea which husbands should work outside and wives should work at home. The survey showed the comparison with Korean cases in 2002, and compared with Korean people, Japan is much more conservative attitude toward “a woman at home.”



⁶⁶ *Naikakufu danjo kyōdō sankakukyoku [Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office]*
<http://www.gender.go.jp/research/kenkyu/intl-compare/pdf/chosa-gaiyo.pdf> (accessed October 1, 2014).



In the same 2002 survey a question asked who had the final decision-making power in the family, 53.4 percent of Japanese people picked the husband or male partner, while 23.8 percent of them picked both, and 16.2 percent answered wife or female partner. In

the same survey held in 1982, 65.5 percent of them answered husband or male partner. Japanese people have been accepting the male-centered society until today.

One of the interviewees actually told me that she gets frustrated by the male-centered custom in Korea but can accept it. She said it was like time slip: she was seeing scenes now in Korea which she had seen in Japan when she was little. For example, food was served to her father or grandfather first. It was normal for her family, and she can do the same thing in her Korean family without hesitation. The Korean traditional events, which require fulfilling the role of daughter-in-law and therefore overwhelm Japanese wives, are not preferable for them. However, even in the situation in which they had to play the role of a daughter-in-law, it seems that they did not take it as forced assimilation. Japanese family values make it easier for some Japanese wives to accept the Korean male-centered practices, and they more likely see the work as an obligation as a daughter-in-law. Japanese traditional customs familiarized, in some way, Japanese wives with Korean traditions.

During the interview, I also asked about their daily food preparation. The interviewees make Japanese food regularly, but also Korean food sometimes. It was not because someone told them to do it, but they said that husband liked it. They said “some Korean food is easy to cook, and my husband never complains about the food,” or “I have made Korean food for a special occasion, and my husband loved the food. I will not make it often, but for special occasions.” In terms of the food preparation, Japanese wives can decide what to eat.

Although I did not ask in a direct way during the interviews, none of the interviewees mentioned that they were forced to be assimilated or forced to be a Korean. They, at least, did not feel in that way. At the same time, some of them try to be or think that they are expected to be a good wife and daughter-in-law in a Korean way. In his book *Ethnic Boundary Making*, the sociologist Andreas Wimmer said that “assimilation into the nation also increases the chance that their voice will be heard now that the government claims to rule in the name of ‘the people.’”⁶⁷ In the case of the Japanese wives, however, as long as women are subordinate to men, being assimilated does not have incentives. Probably assimilation is a too strong word for them because it would include a nuance of giving up their own identity or culture, and many Japanese wives have not thought about the possibility.

3. Everyday Practice: Raising a child in the new society

Childbirth is one of the life-time dramatic events for women, but for Japanese wives it contains more than that. Most of the parents acquired for their children dual nationality as Korean and Japanese. The Japanese Nationality Law allows people, who acquire another nationality before the age of 20, to be a dual national until the age of 22, when they must then choose one or the other. Until the child chooses one nationality, for the mother, the child is half “Japanese” and half “Korean.”

⁶⁷ Wimmer, *Ethnic Boundary Making*, 99.

Becoming a mother made the position of Japanese wives more solid. As for job searching, in a case in which she was previously unemployed, once she becomes a mother she does not have to worry about looking for a job for a while, because in general child-care in both Korea and Japan is considered a wife's work. A blogger mentioned that childbirth or child-care could become an excuse not to join the job market in Korea. One day her American female friend tried to convince her to have a job. Although her husband did not push her to earn money, he also did not have a strong objection against it. He said if she wanted to, she should do it. She could not tell her husband this, but she admitted on the blog that she did not want to enter the job market because of a lack of confidence. Once she learned of her pregnancy, she became relieved because nobody would strongly encourage her to work outside. This feeling would probably be shared with other Japanese wives. Some of newlywed Japanese wives in fact show their hesitation to actively get a job because of a possibility of getting pregnant soon. They think that they have to leave the job once they get pregnant or want to raise the child by herself. The idea probably is from a common practice that a mother will be a full-time care-taker of a child. Being a mother gave them a social position as a "full-time" mother in Korean society.

At the same time, once they have a child, Japanese wives become aware of their Japanese-ness and wish to teach about Japan to the child or children. They become more opinionated and have strong ideas about child raising. Many of them in the blogs express their intention to pass on Japanese culture to their children, especially the

Japanese language. Most of them speak to the children in Japanese when the children are little, hoping to raise the children as bilingual.⁶⁸ Although they know that their children will be growing up as Korean, they want the children to understand Japanese culture.

However, usually the mother is the only person to speak Japanese or to teach about Japan to the child. Therefore, they use or create Japanese networks. Japanese mothers including those who live in Korea due to their husbands' business create groups, for example based on the year which the children was born, such as one group of mothers whose child was born in 2012. Outside of the bloggers groups, some of my interviewees also created a group based on the year of birth. Usually an active Japanese wife takes the initiative to create a group, and some groups are more active than others, but in both cases the wives and the children occasionally meet. The connection among Japanese wives becomes closer after childbirth.

Once a child comes to the family, the relationship with the in-law family and the Korean society tends to change. While a Japanese wife is more connected to the local society, the parents-in-law interfere more. Many Japanese wives also expressed their surprise and confusion towards interference by Korean middle-aged women who they did not know. If a Japanese wife encounters a contradiction between Korean culture and Japanese culture, it becomes not only her issue but her child's issue. One of the wives in the TV program expressed her frustration due to the different child-care between

⁶⁸ One of the interviewees, however, expressed her worry about being unable to teach Japanese to her child, watching her Japanese friends have a hard time doing it. Many of the Japanese mothers wanted to raise their children in Japanese, but not everybody succeeded.

Korean and Japan. She said “in Japan a mother intentionally dresses a baby lightly to makes the baby healthier and stronger, but when [my mother-in-law] saw it she told me to put more clothes on.... I cannot say ‘people do this in Japan.’ Even if I say it, she probably won’t listen to me.”⁶⁹ She was getting irritated, feeling to be forced to follow Korean common sense.

Language is also an important issue for Japanese wives. Many parents-in-law told them not to use Japanese with the children, worrying about their children’s Korean language ability. Another Japanese wife in the TV program gave birth to a second child in Japan. She took her three-year-old daughter to Japan with her, and they stayed in Japan a few months. Her husband visited them and was shocked because the oldest daughter spoke only Japanese and could not communicate with him because he could not understand Japanese. Once she came back to Korea with the two children, her mother-in-law seriously chastised her saying “now you came back to Korea, so you have to speak to the children in Korean. They can forget Japanese.”⁷⁰ This time she said that she had told her mother-in-law that she did not have an intention to raise the children in that way and was going to teach them Japanese. She determined not to be just obedient, but at the same time she decided to send the oldest daughter to a day-care center (어린이집) to expose the daughter to Korean language. Many other Japanese wives faced similar situations.

⁶⁹ “The non-fiction, after marrying into Korea Part 3,” Tokyo, Fuji Television (Tokyo: April 18, 2010).

⁷⁰ “The non-fiction, after marrying into Korea Part 3.”

Japanese wives also encounter an education problem. In Korea educational activities start at a relatively early age. Most Japanese wives use the day-care service which is free now in Korea. Usually a day-care center offers optional lessons in the center and in addition those children have multiple lessons, such as music, art, and English. People, especially Korean mothers, commonly share the idea that entering a good university will ensure the children's success. Students study in cram schools (학원) after regular school, and because of that some of them cannot have dinner with family. From Japanese people's eyes, the situation looks strange or abnormal. Japanese wives disapprove of the "Korean style education" and try to send their children to as few cram schools as possible.

However, the older a child becomes the harder it is to avoid a Korean style education. One of the Japanese wives had three children, and two of them studied in elementary school. Her policy on education was not to send the children to cram school. She had been helping the children study at home, but the subjects were getting more and more difficult. She had no problem communicating with other Korean people, but she had not solved some questions for first grade. She said "math is OK, but Korean (national language) and history are difficult." She worried if the children could not keep up with classmates and felt the limitation to teach her children at home. She expressed her anxiety: She said "I do not know what to do. I sometimes cry, thinking I am a disqualified mother."⁷¹

⁷¹ "The non-fiction, after marrying into Korea Part 3."

The context of education in Korea also makes them feel concerned. Some mothers told me that they worried about anti-Japan education in school. Many of them asked the Japanese school in Seoul if their children could study there, but the school accepts only children who know they are going back to Japan. Unless the family is planning to go back to Japan, children cannot get in. One of the interviewees told me that she might go to her daughter's school to talk about the anti-Japanese elements of the curriculum. Another Japanese wife also really worried about anti-Japanese education and decided to send their daughter to an international school. Some families decide to move to Japan to raise children. These cases show their position between Korea and Japan and how Japanese wives feel their responsibility on raising a child

Once giving birth, the situation changes for the Japanese wives. While the child creates a social position for the mother and an opportunity to develop a sense of belonging to Korean society, the mothers become aware of their own culture and try to become more independent from Korean society. It is the opposite direction from assimilation, although they tend to struggle between Korean and Japanese cultures.

Conclusion

Along with the increasing international marriage, especially between Korean men and Southeast Asian women, assimilation under the name of multiculturalism has become one of the key topics in Korea. Looking into the discussion among scholars,

activists, and mass media, assimilation, which has mentioned in the foreign wives situations in Korea, does not mean “being assimilated to Korean society.” It is rather “behaving like an obedient wife” who her husband and parents-in-law imagine as an ordinary Korean woman becomes after marriage, and the migrant wives would feel the pressure on a daily basis.

Japanese wives in the Korean society, on the other hand, do not feel such a pressure. It is because Japanese society has or used to have the similar expectations for married women. Through everyday practices of Japanese wives we could see that Japanese notions and culture strongly influence them. Therefore, it may be relatively easier for them to accept the Korean expectation, compared to marriage-migrant wives from other countries

Yet giving birth likely changes the situation. On one hand, through the position and activities as a full-time mother, Japanese wives become more exposed and rooted in Korean society. On the other hand, having a child makes them aware of their Japanese-ness. They tend to be connected with other Japanese wives more actively and to teach Japanese language and Japanese culture to the child. They sometimes feel pressure from Korean society or their Korean family, but now they have a power to refuse to follow Korean ways, such as Korean style education. The attitude also proved that they were not assimilated even if they could act or think like Korean women.

In the end, unlike male immigrants to the United States discussed by Andreas Wimmer, there is no incentive for the Japanese wives to be assimilated to Korean

society, because their position after being assimilated would still be subordinate. In other words, the similarly gender-biased ideas between Korea and Japan allow them not to be assimilated to Korean society, but they could potentially be “invisible” in Korean society by following Japanese cultural conventions.

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일상적 실천을 통한 ‘귀속감’의 형성: 한국 사회의 일본 결혼이주 여성들

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다문화주의는 현대 한국사회에서 일상적으로 쓰이는 단어이다. 늘어나는 외국인 노동자들과/인력들과 국제 결혼을 통한 여성 이주자들로 인해, 한국 사회는 단일문화에서 다문화사회로 점차 변화하고 있는 추세이다. 그러나, 이러한 상황은 학문적 논문과 뉴스 보도에서 부정적으로 다루어지고 있다. 예를 들어, 대부분 동남아 출신 여성 결혼이주자들은 한국 사회에 동화되기를 강요받았다. 이 논문에서 필자는 여성 결혼이주자들과 문화적 동화(assimilation)가 한국 사회에서 전반적으로 어떻게 다루어지고 있는지에 대해 얘기를 한 후 일본 출신의 여성 결혼이주자들에 대해 살펴보았다. 이는 일본인 여성 결혼이주자들의 사회적 위상은 동남아 출신의 여성 결혼 이주자와 서양 출신 여성 결혼이주자가 차지한 사회적 위상 사이에서 중간 즈음에 위치해있기 때문이다. 필자는 일본 출신 여성 결혼이주자들의 일상생활의 세 가지 측면에 관심을 기울였다: 구직 활동, 며느리로서의 역할, 그리고 한국에서의 자녀 양육. 이러한 일상 생활에서 일어나는 일들을 통해, 필자는 일본 출신 이주민 아내들이 한국 사회에 동화되어야 한다는 압력을 느끼는지, 그리고 그들이 새로운 사회환경에서 어떻게 반응하고 행동하는지를 관찰하였다.

한국에 사는 대부분의 외국인 아내들은 한국문화에 동화(assimilation)해야 하는

사회적 압력을받는데, 이는 “한국인 사회에 동화되는” 것을 뜻하지 않는다. 이주민 아내들에게 요구되는 동화는 “순종적인 아내”의 역할을 수행하는 것인데, 이는 한국인 남편들과 시부모님들이 결혼 후 아내와 며느리에게 기대하는 이미지와 일치한다. 반면에 일본인 아내들은 이러한 기대를 동화에 대한 압력으로 느끼지 않는다. 일본 사회도 결혼한 여성들에게 비슷한 역할을 기대해왔기 때문에, 이러한 성 역할들은 긍정적으로 생각되지는 않지만 아직도 받아들여지기 때문이다.

이러한 상황은 일본인 아내들이 자녀를 출산하고 양육하게 되면서 바뀌게 되는데, 자녀들이 생김으로써 한국인들과 일본인 아내들이 교류할 기회를 증가시키면서 그들을 한국 사회의 일원으로

되기 때문이다. 한편으로는 일본인 아내들은 한국 사회의 일원이 됨과 동시에, 어머니로서의 역할을 수행하면서 한국 사회로부터 독립적으로 행동하게 되는데, 자신들에게 일본 문화를 알리는 역할을 자신들 밖에 할 수 없다고 느끼기 때문이다. 일본인 아내들은 일상 생활에서 자녀들에게 문화의 영향을 주기 위해 노력한다. 한국과 유사한 성 역할의 아이디어들이 일본인 아내들이 한국 사회에 동화되지 않게 하는 것이다. 일본에 있는 여성의 역할에 대한 생각이 일본 유부녀들이 한국 사회에 동화되지 않는 원인이 되고 있다고 생각된다.

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Keywords: 다문화, 여성 결혼 이민자, 동화

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